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Accused Nazi Faces Deportation After Dropping Citizenship

Romanian Orthodox Archbishop Valerian Trifa, an accused Nazi war criminal, agreed this week to give up his naturalized American citizenship. The Justice Department said it will seek his deportation as soon as his denaturalization proceedings are complete.

The Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations has been seeking to deport Trifa, 66, because it believes he took part in a 1941 pogrom in which thousands of Romanian Jews were killed.

Trifa has denied the charges but Allan Ryan, director of the special investigations office, said a press release and lengthy statement issued by Trifa this week cast no doubt on the department's evidence against him.

Trifa is head of the 50,000-member Romanian Orthodox Church in America, which has its headquarters in Grass Lake, Mich., near Detroit.

The Justice Department first filed a lawsuit seeking Trifa's deportation in 1975. The department charged Trifa had lied about his membership in the Iron Guard, a Romanian fascist organization, when he entered the United States in 1950 and when he was granted citizenship in 1957.

Trifa said in a statement that he decided to give up his citizenship because of the financial cost and the amount of time needed to fight the lawsuit.

Trifa attracted national publicity last December when he was interviewed on Radio Free Europe about his church's 50th anniversary. The Justice Department and Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman, D-N.Y., head of the House immigration subcommittee, condemned his appearance.

When Paul Henze, an aide to national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, said the dispute "certainly isn't serious from the White House point of view," Holtzman urged President Carter to fire him.

Trifa served for a number of years as a member of the National Council of Churches' policymaking general board before he was suspended in 1977.

The Justice Department is seeking to denaturalize or deport 15 other suspected Nazi war criminals living in the United States and is investigating more than 250 other such cases.

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